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SUBJECT: EU ASKS ETHIOPIA TO ALLOW HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

REF: STATE 102381

¶1. (U) Summary: The European Commission's Office for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) is very concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Ogaden region and has asked the Government of Ethiopia (GOE) to allow movement of humanitarian workers and food aid immediately, officials said. The European Commission delegation in Addis has delivered the message, but Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel is considering weighing in at the highest level soon, contacts said. End summary.

¶2. (U) USAID Humanitarian Advisor and PRM Officer delivered reftel points July 30 and 31 to Cees Wittebrood, Head of Unit for Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries at ECHO, and two officials at the European Commission's Directorate General for Development: Jeremy Lester, Head of Unit for the Horn of Africa, and Maria-Paola Piazzardi, Desk Officer for Ethiopia.

Wittebrood said the European Union (EU) has delivered a message to GOE officials through its Delegation in Addis that the EU views restrictions on the movement of humanitarian and food aid in the Ogaden to be in violation of international law and it expects the GOE to change its policies immediately. The EC's Head of Delegation has spoken with senior GOE officials and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wittebrood said. At the working level, ECHO's representative in Addis has been relaying concerns over the Ogaden to UN agencies, NGOs, and the donor community, he said.

¶3. (SBU) USEU officers were told Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Michel is aware of the Ogaden problems and keen to raise the issue with GOE counterparts, but has not done so to date for fear that his engagement on Ogaden will derail ongoing negotiations with the GOE on the release of political prisoners. Michel plans to raise the Ogaden concerns when he believes the time is right, Wittebrood said.

ECHO is not optimistic about the Ogaden. It plans to continue to follow the situation on the ground through the EC's delegation in Addis, and will re-examine its approach should new developments occur. ECHO requested future USG updates on Ogaden-related planning and programming.

¶4. (U) Jeremy Lester, Head of Unit for the Horn of Africa at EC's DG Development, said his office is aware of the restrictions on humanitarian deliveries in the Ogaden and is watching it closely. DG Development has not formally approached the GOE. Lester was not aware of the restrictions on commercial traffic and on the movement of pastoralists, but said it fits a pattern of control that the EU has observed in the Ogaden. In occasional meetings with people from the Ogaden, the Commission often hears complaints about restrictions on journalists and lack of access to health services and education. Lester noted the GOE considers the Ogaden residents as Somalis, rather than Ethiopians, which

exacerbates the problems.

15. (U) USEU will continue to exchange information with ECHO and DG Development and report back any new initiatives.

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